

Message Text

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SUBJECT: TREATMENT OF AMERICAN TOURISTS BY SOVIET CUSTOMS OFFICERS

REF: (A) STATE 2700 (B) MOSCOW 694

1. SUMMARY: REF A INQUIRED ABOUT TREATMENT OF AMERICANS BY SOVIET CUSTOMS OFFICERS. REF B PROVIDED EMBASSY'S SUMMARY REPLY, AND THIS CABLE CONTAINS ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT TREATMENT OF AMERICAN TOURISTS AND PRIVATE VISITORS. END SUMMARY.

2. AS NOTED REF B, CONSULAR SECTION RECEIVED FEW COMPLAINTS ABOUT SOVIET CUSTOMS PRACTICES FROM AMERICAN TOURISTS OR PRIVATE VISITORS IN RECENT MONTHS. CONSULAR SECTION FILES REFLECT CONSIDERABLY LESS CASES IN 1974 THAN 1973. RECENT EXPERIENCE IS THAT SOVIET CUSTOMS OFFICERS HAVE BEEN GENERALLY CORRECT AND CORDIAL WITH AMERICAN TOURISTS AND PRIVATE VISITORS, AND COOPERATIVE WITH CONSULAR SECTION IN RESOLVING CASES WHICH ARISE.

3. PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED GENERALLY INVOLVED PRIVATE VISITORS TRYING TO BRING GOODS TO SOVIET RELATIVES. FOR EXAMPLE, AN AMERICAN PRIVATE VISITOR RECENTLY ARRIVED WITH 13 WIGS. SHE ACKNOWLEDGED SIX WERE FOR RELATIVES, BUT INSISTED

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SEVEN WERE FOR HER OWN USE -- SHE NEEDED THEM BECAUSE OF

"UNPREDICTABLE SOVIET WEATHER." SOVIET CUSTOMS OFFICERS DID NOT PERMIT HER TO BRING THEM INTO USSR WITHOUT PAYING DUTY, BUT SUBSEQUENTLY AGREED TO RETURN THEM TO BE TAKEN OUT OF USSR BY OWNER, HER REPRESENTATIVE OR EMBASSY.

4. JEWISH AND OTHER RELIGIOUS LITERATURE: GIVEN CURRENT CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET JEWRY WITHIN AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, THERE HAVE BEEN SURPRISINGLY FEW INCIDENTS REPORTED TO US ABOUT SOVIET CUSTOMS SEIZURES OF JEWISH AND HEBREW LITERATURE. FOR EXAMPLE OF SUCH INCIDENT SEE MOSCOW 10027 OF JUNE 26, 1974. CONSULAR SECTION'S EXPERIENCE IS THAT CUSTOMS OFFICERS WILL NOT SEIZE ONE OR TWO RELIGIOUS BOOKS FROM TRAVELLER, BUT WILL IMPOUND MATERIAL IF TRAVELLER HAS DUPLICATE COPIES OR NUMEROUS PUBLICATIONS. AS FAR AS WE KNOW IMPOUNDED RELIGIOUS BOOKS ARE GENERALLY RETURNED TO TRAVELLER UPON DEPARTURE IF FROM SAME AIRPORT.

5. AT LEAST AT SHEREMETEVO CUSTOMS OFFICERS MAY BE MORE APT TO IMPOUND HEBREW AND BALTIC-LANGUAGES RELIGIOUS BOOKS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE IMMEDIATELY-AVAILABLE LANGUAGE CAPABILITY TO SCAN AND MONITOR THEM FOR CONTENT. CONSOFFS HAVE SEEN THEM SCAN ENGLISH AND GERMAN-LANGUAGE PRAYER BOOKS AND RETURN THEM TO TRAVELLERS IMMEDIATELY.

6. POLITICAL MATERIAL: PROHIBITED POLITICAL PUBLICATIONS SUCH AS GULAG, ETC, ARE, OF COURSE, SEIZED IF FOUND AND, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, NOT RETURNED. FOR EXAMPLE, SEE LENINGRAD 420. HOWEVER, NO RECENT CASES INVOLVING TOURISTS OR PRIVATE VISITORS HAVE COME TO OUR ATTENTION.

7. PORNOGRAPHY: SOVIETS PROHIBIT ALL KINDS OF "PORNOGRAPHY," AND IN USSR TERM INCLUDES MAGAZINES SUCH AS PLAYBOY, PENTHOUSE, ETC. TRAVELLERS NEVER COMPLAIN TO EMBASSY ABOUT SEIZURES OF SUCH PUBLICATIONS.

8. ART WORKS: CUSTOMS PROBLEMS PERIODICALLY ARISE WHEN TOURISTS SEEK TO EXIT RPT EXIT USSR WITH ART OBJECTS. SEE, FOR EXAMPLE, CASE OF PROFESSOR BYRON LINDSEY -- EMBASSY'S DS-4 OF SEPT 27, 1974 TO NATHANSON SOV IN RESPONSE TO SOV DS-4 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF AUG 20. WHILE EMBASSY CAN APPRECIATE SOVIET DESIRE TO CONTROL EXPORT OF ART TREASURES, PRESENT PROCEDURES FOR TAKING OUT ANY ART OR ANTIQUE PURCHASED LEGALLY BUT NOT AT SPECIAL STORES ARE OBSCURE AND CUMBERSOME.

9. MANUSCRIPTS: IN PAST WORST CUSTOMS CASES HAVE INVOLVED SOVIET SEIZURE FROM VISITING AMERICAN SCHOLARS OF THEIR MANUSCRIPTS INVOLVING RUSSIAN OR SOVIET SUBJECT MATTER.

REPRESENTATIVE EPIC CASE WAS THAT OF EDYTHE LUTZKER
(MOSCOW 16161 OF DEC 29, 1973 AND PREVIOUS). HOWEVER,
EMBASSY IS NOT AWARE OF ANY SUCH RECENT CASES.
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